United Nations A/69/212

General Assembly

Distr.: General
31 July 2014

Original: English

Sixty-ninth session
Item 65 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Promotion and protection of the rights of children

Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

Summary

The present report is submitted to the General Assembly pursuant to its resolution 68/147 on the rights of the child, in which it requested the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to submit a report to the Assembly on the activities undertaken in discharging her mandate and on the progress achieved in advancing the children and armed conflict agenda.

The report covers the period from August 2013 to July 2014. It describes trends, selected issues of concern and progress made over the past year at both the policy and operational levels, including the mainstreaming of child protection issues within the United Nations system.

The report also provides information on field visits of the Special Representative, on her engagement with regional organizations and international partners and on dialogue with parties to conflict. It outlines a number of challenges and priorities in her agenda and concludes with a set of recommendations to enhance the protection of children affected by conflict.

* A/69/150.

14-58528 (E) 290814

Please recycle

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 68/147, the General Assembly requested the Special Representative to submit a report on the activities undertaken in discharging her mandate, including information on field visits, progress made and challenges faced in the advancement of the children and armed conflict agenda. The present report highlights progress made over the past year and outlines the immediate priorities, as well as a longer-term vision, to advance the children and armed conflict agenda in collaboration with Member States, United Nations entities, regional and subregional organizations and civil society.

II. Trends and challenges in the children and armed conflict agenda

2. Since the creation of the mandate of the Special Representative by the General Assembly in its resolution 51/77, the plight of children continues to bring the international community together to end and prevent grave violations against children in armed conflict. Through enhanced coordination among child protection actors within and beyond the United Nations system, progress has been achieved at both the normative and policy levels. The present report highlights the important new initiatives undertaken and commitments renewed during the period under review to improve the well-being of children living in the direst of circumstances.

3. Despite the continued engagement and progress made, the situation of children affected by armed conflict around the world remains of grave concern. In the previous report to the General Assembly, the Special Representative highlighted three crises that marked the reporting period. The past 12 months have witnessed an escalation of conflict in an increasing number of countries/areas and situations, including the Central African Republic, Iraq, Nigeria, South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic and, most recently, in the State of Palestine and in Libya. There was also increased instability in several other situations.

4. At the time of reporting, the situations in the State of Palestine and in Israel as well as in Iraq and Libya deteriorated dramatically, while the level of conflict in South Sudan continued to be alarming. All parties must be held accountable for violations committed against children, and for the violations that have had a severe impact on their lives, including attacks on schools, hospitals and protected personnel. The high number of civilian casualties in Gaza, of which at least one quarter have been children, is unacceptable. In Iraq, the recent escalation of violence and fighting between the Government and armed groups is causing a significant loss of civilian lives. Sadly, this is coupled with indications that children are being recruited and used by all sides in the conflict.

5. Children have been deprived of their most basic rights in many situations. They have witnessed and sometimes even been forced to commit atrocities. During the reporting period, attacks against civilians and the conduct of hostilities in populated areas have resulted in a spike in documented cases of killing and maiming of children in several situations. Children are being killed in aerial shellings with barrel bombs or rockets, in attacks carried out with increasingly sophisticated improvised explosive devices, or are being shot on their way to school.

6. Access to education and health care during conflict is a growing concern. In recent years, the international community has become increasingly aware of the impact of attacks on schools and hospitals and of the military use of schools. During the reporting period, the monitoring and reporting on and response to those violations have been further strengthened by increased advocacy and the development of operational strategies to prevent and end such practices by parties to conflict. The guidance note entitled "Protect Schools and Hospitals: end attacks on education and health care" launched by the Special Representative jointly with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO), and the draft Lucens guidelines for protecting schools and universities from military use during armed conflict, are two noteworthy initiatives in that regard. However, more must be done to mitigate the devastating impact of the worrisome increase in attacks on educational and medical facilities.

7. Advocacy to protect schools and raising awareness about the need to adhere to international humanitarian law must be undertaken during times of peace but become even more urgent during times of conflict. The cumbersome process of rebuilding a school and restoring a community's trust in its safety often leaves children without education for months or years. In a current conflict, such as that in the Syrian Arab Republic, this is a key concern. The United Nations and its partners are trying to ameliorate the situation through the "No Lost Generation" campaign.

8. Radicalized groups with ideological motives are gaining prominence in a number of conflict settings, including Iraq, Nigeria and the Syrian Arab Republic. Such ideologically driven warfare poses an additional threat to the well-being of children, often leading to an increase in the indiscriminate killing and maiming of civilians, targeted attacks on school facilities and sexual violence. In many situations, children are forced to participate in the conflict through ideological indoctrination or, conversely, become the target of attacks themselves by such groups in the name of ideology. In the parts of the Syrian Arab Republic controlled by extremist groups, such as the Islamic State, all regular education activities have ceased. In such areas, children are increasingly subjected to radicalized ideological education that incites to violence, or are refused access to education based on their gender or other personal attributes. In Nigeria, the abduction of more than 250 school girls, and the killing of boys and girls in attacks on schools by Boko Haram, are tragic examples of how radicalized extremist armed groups are targeting children.

9. The radicalization of armed groups poses a number of challenges. New measures and strategies to address these challenges, including counter-terrorism strategies, are often seen through a security lens, which can have worrying consequences for children. With changing perceptions of the status of combatants within the counter-terrorism framework, children recruited and used by radical armed groups are no longer primarily seen solely as victims of armed conflict but may also be considered perpetrators. Such conflation often leads to the detention of children accused of association with an armed group, which further complicates the task of addressing the variety of violations committed against children in situations of armed conflict. Given that many counter-terrorism strategies typically involve the long-term deprivation of liberty and sometimes solitary confinement of individuals involved in perceived or actual terrorist activities, the implications for children in such circumstances constitute a growing and grave concern.

10. Sexual violence continues to be committed and to dramatically affect girls and boys in conflict situations. Sexual violence against children has long gone underreported as a result of social stigma and structural challenges, including the often limited access to justice by victims in conflict-affected countries. While it remains difficult to document incidents of rape and sexual violence, the trends and patterns are known. Rape and sexual violence not only happen in the context of attacks on the general civilian population but are also targeted at specific groups or communities, sometimes based on ethnicity. This creates havoc in communities where underage girls are found pregnant from rape and babies born out of rape are not always accepted. While most of the perpetrators of sexual violence against children are often known, they enjoy impunity in the majority of cases. The lack of accountability and the non-prosecution of perpetrators present a disheartening picture. The response to rape and sexual violence against children must continue to be multifaceted and encompass medical, psychosocial and legal assistance. The global advocacy and political momentum created by the June 2014 Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, in which the Special Representative participated, sent a powerful signal in this regard.

III. Dialogue, commitments and action plans with parties to conflict

A. "Children, Not Soldiers": ending the recruitment and use of children by Government forces in conflict

11. On 6 March 2014, the Special Representative and UNICEF launched the campaign "Children, Not Soldiers" to end the recruitment and use of children by Government forces in conflict by 2016. The campaign was launched under the auspices of the Government of Luxembourg, Chair of the Working Group of the Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict.

12. The campaign Children, Not Soldiers involves the eight Governments whose national security forces are listed in the annexes to the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (A/67/845) for their engagement in the recruitment and use of children. They are Afghanistan, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, the Sudan and Yemen. All concerned Member States endorsed the objectives of the campaign and committed to ending and preventing the recruitment and use of children by their security forces by 2016.

13. The campaign aims to strengthen cooperation with Governments to ensure that children are protected from recruitment by national armed forces and the national police. The Special Representative and UNICEF are mobilizing support to accelerate the full implementation of those action plans. During the launch in March 2014, a large number of Member States expressed their support for the campaign and willingness to assist concerned Governments on their path to compliance.

14. Prior to the campaign launch, the armed forces of six of the eight Governments — Afghanistan, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Somalia and South Sudan — had signed action plans with the United Nations. Subsequent to the campaign launch, in May 2014, the Yemeni authorities signed an action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children. In June

2014, the Government of South Sudan recommitted to fully implementing the action plan it had signed with the United Nations in 2012 and, in July, the Government of Afghanistan formally agreed to an accelerated road map for compliance with the action plan it had signed in 2011.

15. Chad's deployment of troops in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali contributed to renewed momentum to engage with the United Nations to accelerate the implementation of the action plan it had signed in 2011 to end and prevent underage recruitment in the Armée nationale tchadienne. The Special Representative and UNICEF engaged with Chadian authorities and jointly adopted a road map detailing specific measures to achieve compliance with the action plan, which was fully implemented through sustained collaboration. As a result, the Armée nationale tchadienne was delisted from the annexes to the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed (A/68/878-S/2014/339). While a number of challenges remain to ensure the sustainability of the gains achieved, the progress accomplished by Chad demonstrates that, with national ownership and clear targets, the action plan process can effectively contribute to strengthening the capacity of national security forces to respect child rights.

16. The Children, Not Soldiers campaign also serves as a platform for advocacy and a catalyst for national and regional initiatives in support of the broader children and armed conflict agenda. For example, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the campaign "Plus jamais de Kadogo" was developed to support the Children, Not Soldiers campaign with messages adapted to the local audience and addressing all parties to the conflict. In addition, the African Union the European Union and several Member States proactively supported the goals of the campaign. In order to ensure durable progress, the Special Representative will also prioritize facilitating cooperation between the Member States concerned and the exchange of good practices among them.

B. Engaging non-State actors

17. Engagement and dialogue with non-State armed groups to end grave violations against children is central to the implementation of the children and armed conflict mandate and has been a longstanding priority for the Special Representative. Since the inception of the mandate, the Special Representative has engaged with armed groups through dialogue, written commitments and the signing and implementation of action plans. Over the years, those efforts have yielded concrete results. Thirteen non-State actors have signed action plans with the United Nations, namely in the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, South Sudan and the Sudan.

18. The challenge of engaging armed non-State actors, however, is growing. Out of the 59 parties cited for grave violations in the annexes to the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (A/68/878-S/2014/339), 51 are non-State armed groups. This calls for enhanced efforts by the United Nations and its partners to address the growing role of non-State actors in a number of current conflicts. Over the course of the reporting period, the Special Representative and United Nations partners interacted with a number of armed groups. As such, the growing number of public statements and command orders issued by armed groups

prohibiting the recruitment and use of children and other grave violations have provided a basis for building renewed momentum.

19. Dialogue and concrete commitments to sign action plans with non-State actors is currently under way, including in the Central African Republic, Mali, Myanmar, the Philippines, Sudan, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. Recent progress in establishing a dialogue was made with the Al-Houthi/Ansar Allah in Yemen and the Syrian National Coalition, as well as with armed groups operating in the Central African Republic and South Sudan.

20. It is important to recognize, however, that non-State actors do not constitute a homogenous group and that challenges remain in a number of situations where United Nations engagement is limited or stalled. Such challenges include limitations in access, ideological convictions, including a lack of incentive or political will to engage with the United Nations, and an absence of structured chains of command and identifiable leadership.

21. Achieving cooperation from Governments on the acceptance of a dialogue between the United Nations and listed armed groups is crucial as is ensuring that the United Nations is able to undertake monitoring and follow-up of signed commitments. A number of Governments have facilitated support from the outset by granting the United Nations dialogue with armed groups concerning child protection. In the case of Myanmar, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Yemen, for example, the respective Governments facilitated dialogue with certain armed groups in accordance with Security Council resolution 1612 (2005). The Special Representative will continue to advocate for access to non-State armed groups and engage with them through multidimensional strategies to ensure the protection and well-being of children.

C. Identifying entry points in mediation and peace processes

22. Addressing grave violations by State and non-State armed groups and engaging perpetrators on concrete measures to end and prevent such practices must be made using a case-by-case approach. One suggested strategy of engagement is the mainstreaming of child protection concerns in mediation and peace processes. Incorporating specific commitments into political settlements, ceasefire arrangements, peace agreements and relevant implementation mechanisms can provide unique opportunities and entry points for the protection of children.

23. When there is an opportunity for dialogue, parties to the conflict should be prompted to commit to immediately protecting children from all grave violations. The inclusion of those provisions would pave the way for child protection actors to implement protection and prevention activities and would open doors for dialogue with the parties to end and prevent grave violations. In that regard, the cessation-of-hostilities agreement between armed groups in the Central African Republic signed during the Central African national reconciliation forum, held in Brazzaville on 23 July, is an example of how the inclusion of specific and explicit commitments by signatories constitutes a first step to ensure the protection of children within the wider political process.

24. Early consideration of children's issues in peace-making processes can also facilitate the planning and mobilization of resources. For instance, the release and

reintegration of children associated with armed forces or groups is strongly linked to security arrangements in peace processes. It is also an integral part of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, which requires a specific focus on provisions for children, in particular girls. In that regard, the Special Representative commends the General Assembly for its continued call to States and regional organizations to support the inclusion of such commitments in peace agreements (see resolution 68/147). However, this aspect often remains neglected.

25. Mainstreaming child protection in peace processes can also pave the way for the development of time-bound measures to address the needs of conflict-affected children. Where a previous action plan exists, a peace process can offer an opportunity to revitalize commitments and accelerate action plan implementation. Alternatively, dialogue on child protection with parties to a peace process can provide an entry point for mediation efforts. Agreeing on minimum standards for children, for example, the early demobilization of child soldiers, can serve as a confidence- and trust-building measure. This was the case in Nepal, where negotiations on the action plan to end the recruitment and use of children in 2009 served as an entry point for the overall dialogue on the implementation of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, as stipulated in the 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

26. In the context of her mandate, the Special Representative has continued to engage with mediators, special envoys and regional organizations to integrate the protection of children into peacemaking initiatives on a case-by-case basis, trying to ensure that all those who can influence and have access to parties in a conflict do not overlook issues related to conflict-affected children. This has implied reaching out to and holding regular meetings with special representatives and special envoys to find mutually reinforcing ways to cooperate.

27. In that spirit, the Special Representative reached out to the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region to ensure that the issue of children remained central in her engagements with pertinent parties. Similarly, she liaised closely with the former Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria. Regarding the conflict in the Central African Republic, the Special Representative engaged with mediators involved in peace efforts, such as representatives of the Economic Community of Central African States, the African Union and the United Nations, to advocate for the inclusion of specific commitments. Regarding the situation in Yemen, the Special Representative reached out to the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Yemen and engaged with representatives of the countries of the Gulf Initiative to ensure that the protection of children, including in respect of implementing the action plan and reintegration, will be included in their discussions and initiatives. More recently, she engaged with Intergovernmental Authority on Development mediators to identify ways of strengthening cooperation in the context of the peace talks in South Sudan.

28. The recent commitments that the Special Representative was able to obtain from the Government of South Sudan and the opposition forces demonstrate that, in some cases, eliciting commitments by parties to conflict in the context of a mediation process to end grave violations committed against children can only be achieved through complementary and synergistic actions by different actors. In that regard, the Special Representative is engaging with a number of partners to identify and refine key elements of guidance that can be used in mediation processes, with

due consideration given to the specifics of each mediation process. She will continue to work closely with the mediation community and to reach out to representatives of academia, specialized civil society organizations, experienced third-party mediators and other practitioners.

IV. Raising global awareness and mainstreaming

29. As an independent moral voice and global advocate for the protection of children affected by armed conflict, the Special Representative engaged actively with Member States, regional organizations and civil society throughout the reporting period. Her engagement involved numerous initiatives, including advocacy and reporting to the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, conducting field visits, developing guidance and strengthening partnerships within and beyond the United Nations system. Finally, the Special Representative was a public advocate on a number of occasions in various public forums.

A. Briefings and global advocacy

30. Throughout the reporting period, the Special Representative was invited to brief various United Nations bodies, including the Security Council and its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, on the humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Mali, South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic. She also presented to the Working Group four reports of the Secretary-General on the situation of children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, the Philippines and the Syrian Arab Republic. On 7 March, the Special Representative and UNICEF briefed the Security Council on the launch of the campaign Children, Not Soldiers. The Council subsequently endorsed the objectives of the campaign by adopting resolution 2143 (2014). This is the first time that a resolution has included a reference to the importance of universal birth registration as a tool to prevent underage recruitment. The Council's acknowledgement that the military use of schools is a deep concern has invigorated the policy development process. The process reflects and has reinforced the mandates of a number of resolutions adopted by the General Assembly (for example, 66/141, 63/241, 57/190 and 55/79) that have called for measures to ensure that the rights of children to education and health are respected.

31. On 5 May, the Special Representative, together with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, briefed the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013) concerning the Central African Republic, sharing information on grave violations committed against children and calling for action by the Committee to target perpetrators.

32. The Special Representative provided an oral update to the Human Rights Council at the opening of its 24th session, held in September 2013, and again on 12 March 2014. On both occasions, she highlighted the need to include the issue of children in armed conflict in all human rights reporting and recommendations. In Geneva, the Special Representative briefed the African and Asian regional groups to highlight trends and challenges related to the children and armed conflict mandate;

promote new ratifications of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict; and to solicit their support for the Children, Not Soldiers campaign.

33. In May, in Addis Ababa, the Special representative was invited to chair a side-event with African States in respect of the Children, Not Soldiers campaign to discuss specific challenges, best practices and strategies towards ending the recruitment and use of children by Government forces. The event was organized by Luxembourg with the assistance of the African Union. An informal group of interested partner States was formed to advance the discussion in Addis Ababa.

34. In May, the Special Representative co-hosted an event in New York with France to take stock of progress made and remaining challenges since the adoption of Security Council resolution 1539 (2004), in which the Council formalized the action plan process to end the recruitment and use of children. The event, in which UNICEF and the Permanent Representatives of Benin and Luxembourg to the United Nations also participated, highlighted that action plans had proved to be effective tools to protect children affected by conflict and echoed repeated calls by the General Assembly for Member States to take effective measures to end all grave violations against children.

35. In June, the Special Representative participated in the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, co-hosted by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, William Hague, and the Special Envoy of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Angelina Jolie. The summit galvanized global political support to combat sexual violence in conflict, and for the first time gathered voices from all geographical horizons and backgrounds to speak about the issue. The Special Representative seized the opportunity to bring the issue of sexual violence against children to the forefront and to reinforce the messages delivered by the United Nations and civil society partners.

36. Throughout the reporting period, the Special Representative consistently engaged with Member States in respect of her agenda through the permanent missions in New York, either during events with regional organizations or field visits. She has also engaged bilaterally with Member States interested in providing support and technical assistance for the implementation of the children and armed conflict agenda. Her bilateral engagements with officials from countries affected by conflict situations have been in support of their efforts to end and prevent grave violations against children.

37. For example, in June, she participated in a high-level round table event on the recruitment and use of children by national armed forces, with a particular focus on the reintegration of children, at the invitation of the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The round table was attended by ministerial delegations of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone and Somalia and provided a forum for sharing experiences and lessons learned from countries that had ended the recruitment and use of children and for those making progress on aspects of the reintegration of children separated from armed forces and armed groups. The round table reinforced similar discussions held in Geneva, Switzerland, in March and in Addis Ababa in May and highlighted the importance of sharing experiences in respect of promoting national ownership. A declaration of commitment was issued at the conclusion of the round table.

38. The Special Representative has advocated for the inclusion of the issue of children and armed conflict into discussions on the post-2015 agenda. In that regard, she attended a retreat for permanent representatives of African countries in New York in April aimed at consolidating the position of the Group of African States. Similarly, at the invitation of the Government of Algeria, she travelled to Algiers in May to attend the 17th Ministerial Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement, which emerged as another opportunity to strengthen her advocacy in respect of the post-2015 agenda.

39. In the context of her advocacy, the Special Representative continued to promote the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. During the reporting period, three countries/areas (Ethiopia, Estonia and the State of Palestine) ratified the Optional Protocol, bringing the total number of ratifications to 156. The European Union is the first regional organization to have achieve 100 per cent ratification of the Optional Protocol.

40. The Special Representative also engaged in public activities to raise awareness and mobilize support for the protection of children affected by armed conflict. She delivered lectures to advocacy groups and at universities, such as the London School of Economics and Harvard University, and think tanks, such as the London-based Chatham House and the Seattle-based Council of World Affairs. She was a keynote or guest speaker at a wide range of events.

41. The Special Representative also gave interviews to members of the international media on a regular basis to advocate for the protection of children affected by conflict and to raise the profile of situations in which grave violations against children were being committed. In addition, the Special Representative reached out to the general public through communications posted on the website of her office, which were made available in the six official languages of the United Nations, and through social media. Since August 2013, the Special Representative's social media outreach has more than doubled in size.

B. Field visits

42. Field visits are central to the Special Representative's advocacy efforts since they represent opportunities to engage directly with Governments and other parties to a conflict to advocate for the protection of children, to secure concrete commitments and to support the implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism.

43. During the reporting period, she conducted field visits to Côte d'Ivoire (October 2013), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (November 2013) and Yemen (May 2014). She also conducted joint visits to the Central African Republic in December 2013 with the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide and a representative of the Office of the Special Representative to the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and to South Sudan in June 2014 with the Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova and the UNESCO Special Envoy for Peace and Reconciliation, Forest Whitaker. The field visits provided opportunities to follow up on the implementation of action plans, to assess first-hand the impact of conflict on children and to advocate specific aspects of the mandate. During her visits, the Special Representative met with

Government officials, senior representatives of national armed forces and law enforcement agencies, non-State armed groups, representatives of the humanitarian community, the diplomatic community and civil society, internally displaced persons and children affected by armed conflict.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

44. The Special Representative travelled to the Kinshasa, Goma, Rutshuru and Beni in the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 17 to 23 November 2013 to evaluate the situation of children and the progress achieved by the Government and the United Nations since the signing of the action plan in October 2012.

45. The Special Representative welcomed the strong collaboration between the Government, UNICEF and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which resulted in the release of hundreds of children from the national security forces. She also discussed the progress and challenges in responding to violations against children and in addressing impunity, emphasizing the need for stronger age verification procedures within national security forces and for the full implementation of the prohibition against the detention of children associated with armed groups.

46. In the light of the activities of armed groups, the Special Representative stressed the importance of sustained efforts to ensure that the special needs of children were fully addressed in the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme and to ensure that perpetrators of child rights violations were not integrated into the national security forces and were held accountable. She also insisted that the rehabilitation of schools be made a priority so as to give children opportunities for a better future.

Central African Republic

47. In the context of the escalating violence and the deteriorating security situation in the Central African Republic, the Special Representative visited the country from 17 to 21 December 2013, together with the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, and a representative of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

48. The visit was conducted only days after the killing of over 1,000 people in sectarian violence and following large-scale violations against children by ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka groups. The primary aim of the visit was to assess the impact of the conflict on children and to advocate with transitional authorities and other relevant interlocutors the cessation of violence and better protection for civilians. The Special Representative urged the transitional authorities to ensure safe access to cantonment sites and to facilitate the identification and handover of children associated with armed groups. She also met with representatives of the African-led International Support Mission in the Central African Republic and Opération Sangaris, the French military contingent in the Central African Republic, to discuss operational issues to enhance the protection of children. She had meetings with religious and civil society leaders to identify entry points for community-based dialogue. In addition, she met families displaced by the conflict and interacted with humanitarian actors in Bangui and Bossangoa to assess their needs and to understand the challenges they faced.

49. The Special Representative called for the rapid strengthening of the United Nations capacity to ensure an adequate response to the child protection crisis. She also engaged with United Nations and African Union partners to ensure that commitments to end the recruitment and use of children and other grave violations against children by parties to the conflict would be included in a political settlement. This resulted in such references being included in the agreement on the cessation of hostilities signed in Brazzaville on 23 July.

Yemen

50. At the invitation of the Government, the Special Representative travelled to Yemen from 13 to 15 May for the signing of an action plan to end the recruitment and use of children by Government forces. The visit followed her trip to Yemen in November 2012 to facilitate dialogue with the Government on the issue.

51. The signing of the action plan, which followed over a year of negotiations between UNICEF and representatives of the Government, marked an important step and reflected the Government's commitment to achieving long-term stability through security sector reform and in full respect of the rule of law and human rights.

52. A number of key measures need to be taken as a matter of priority in order to ensure meaningful implementation of the action plan, such as age determination procedures, and to set the age for voluntary recruitment in conformity with Yemen's international obligations. The establishment of an interministerial committee will also be essential as will be the strengthening of the civil registration authority to ensure universal and free registration at birth.

South Sudan

53. The Special Representative travelled to South Sudan from 22 to 27 June to assess the impact on children of the crisis that has unfolded since 15 December 2013 and to follow up on the implementation of the action plan signed in 2012. On 24 June, she witnessed the signature of a recommitment agreement by the Government of South Sudan and the United Nations to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Sudan People's Liberation Army. The agreement also addressed the killing and maiming of children, sexual violence against children and attacks on schools and hospitals. Part of the visit was conducted jointly with the Director General of UNESCO Director-General and the UNESCO Special Envoy for Peace and Reconciliation, and included advocacy activities for the protection of schools and education in conflict zones.

54. In her various interactions with interlocutors from the Government, the Sudan People's Liberation Army, the South Sudan national police service and the United Nations, the Special Representative called upon the South Sudanese leaders to stop the humanitarian crisis, end the grave violations against children and ensure accountability by bringing perpetrators to justice. She advocated along similar lines with non-State armed groups, such as the South Sudan Democratic Movement/Army under David Yau Yau, and the South Sudan Liberation Army, which had integrated into the Sudan People's Liberation Army in 2013.

55. Prior to the above-mentioned visit, the Special Representative met in Addis Ababa in May with the former vice-president and leader of the Sudan People's

Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition, Riek Machar, to whom she relayed her concerns regarding reports of large numbers of children recruited and used, killed, maimed or raped by his forces. She obtained a signed commitment to end the recruitment and use of children and all grave violations against children. At the time of reporting, the commitment had yet to be implemented, and violations against children continued unabated by both sides.

Côte d'Ivoire

56. The Special Representative visited Côte d'Ivoire from 26 to 30 October 2013 on the occasion of the fourth high-level retreat on the promotion of peace, security and stability in Africa, which was convened by the African Union in Abidjan. She met with the Ivoirian authorities as well as with the senior leadership of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire and members of the United Nations country team. Although significant progress has been made with regard to the recruitment and use of children, impunity for perpetrators of sexual violence and limited access to justice for victims of sexual violence remain concerns to be addressed through support provided to the justice system and through legislative and procedural reform. The Special Representative advocated strengthening the legal framework and taking action to overcome judicial blockages, in particular the obliging of victims to submit costly medical certificates in order to file a complaint, which constitutes a major obstacle to pressing charges against suspected perpetrators.

C. Protecting schools and hospitals from attack

57. Under international humanitarian law, both schools and hospitals are protected civilian objects and therefore benefit from the humanitarian principles of distinction. However, attacks on schools and hospitals during armed conflict are alarmingly widespread and carry grave risks for children. In its resolutions 1998 (2011) and 2143 (2014), the Security Council highlighted the violation of attacks on schools and hospitals, provided clear direction on the need to monitor and report on this grave violation, expressed deep concern over the military use of schools, and encouraged Member States to formulate concrete measures to deter such practices. Similarly, the General Assembly has called upon States to ensure continuous access to education for children affected by armed conflict.

58. In order to promote the implementation of those resolutions, the Special Representative, in collaboration with UNESCO, UNICEF and WHO, developed the guidance note entitled "Protect schools and hospitals: end attacks on education and health care". The guidance note, which was launched on 21 May, aims to strengthen monitoring of and reporting on attacks on schools and hospitals by providing key definitions and practical advice. The guidance note also promotes advocacy and dialogue with parties to conflict and the deepening of partnerships between various stakeholders in addressing the plight of children seeking access to education and health care. In addition, it provides practical advice on how to advocate with parties to conflict in order to prevent the military use of schools and hospitals. With a view to ensuring wide dissemination and effective implementation, the guidance is being published in English, French and Arabic. The Special Representative strongly encourages Member States to promote the guidance note and to institute changes in national policies and legislation, and to include the guidelines in military doctrine, manuals and training.

D. Supporting the effective reintegration of children

59. While disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes are crucial to addressing the recruitment and use of children, the reintegration aspect is fundamental to mitigating the risks of rerecruitment by armed groups by providing appealing and durable options to children. Family tracing and reunification, community reintegration, psycho-social assistance, education and skills training are just a few of the services that are essential to helping children to recover from the impact of conflict and to transition into adulthood.

60. Children recruited and used by armed forces and groups have been out of their communities and out of school, sometimes for years; they must often reacquire the social skills needed to interact with their communities and to access economic and livelihood opportunities. The concept of sustainable community-based reintegration is not new. It was part of the recommendations of the 1996 report prepared by Graça Machel on the impact of armed conflict on children. However, implementing effective reintegration programmes continues to be a challenge. Adequate resources to provide effective programmes are too often lacking.

61. Partnerships between concerned Governments, donor countries, the United Nations and civil society must encompass all phases of post-conflict intervention, from recovery to peacebuilding and development. The reintegration needs of children separated from armed forces or groups should be increasingly reflected in peacebuilding strategies with a view to making children and youth programming a foundation for durable peace.

62. In addition, the Special Representative participated in initiatives to promote South-South dialogue on child reintegration, such as the Third Global Conference on Child Labour organized by the International Labour Organization (ILO), which was convened in Brasilia in November 2013. At the conference, the Special Representative encouraged participants to prioritize the issue of child soldiers; participated at a side event hosted by Luxembourg during the African Union open debate held in May 2014; and attended a ministerial round table on children and armed conflict at the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict convened in London in June. The events provided the opportunity to generate discussions between countries that have undergone similar experiences in child disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, and allowed participants to share experience and lessons learned. The Special Representative will continue to build upon such positive initiatives that promote South-South networking around child reintegration.

63. The Special Representative is particularly pleased to note the efforts of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to increase access among refugees and internally displaced persons to education, even in the emergency phases of its operations. The UNHCR focus on access to education as a protection tool to prevent forced recruitment, sexual violence, child labour and early or forced marriages is a step in the right direction. With 51 million persons under its mandate, UNHCR has gone a long way, alongside host authorities, to ensure that education brings a brighter future for young people in difficult circumstances.

64. The elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda provides an additional opportunity to reflect on expertise and lessons learned from decades of reintegration programmes. The Special Representative is convinced that best practices in respect

of reintegration should be included in the new development agenda as an essential aspect of community-building in post-conflict societies.

V. Collaboration and partnership

A. Update on collaboration with United Nations partners

65. In line with the Special Representative's mandate to collaborate and coordinate with United Nations entities on children and armed conflict, the Special Representative continued to work with the specialized agencies, funds, programmes of the United Nations programme and departments/offices of the Secretariat, including the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the International Labour Organization, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Development Programme, UNESCO, UNHCR, UNICEF and WHO, both in the field and at United Nations Headquarters, to strengthen monitoring and reporting mechanisms and to work on joint initiatives to foster cooperation and synergy in areas of common interest to promote and protect children affected by armed conflict.

66. The Special Representative also worked closely with OHCHR as well as with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide. Joint demarches in crisis situations and the exchange of information on grave violations falling under the purview of their respective mandates were intensified, including in the context of the Rights Up Front Action Plan. Joint visits to the Central African Republic and South Sudan provided opportunities to enhance coordination of advocacy and to increase the impact of advocacy on the plight of vulnerable populations in conflict, notably children. The Special Representative also reached out to the United Nations commissions of inquiry for the Central African Republic and South Sudan to share information pertaining to grave violations against children and to insist on the importance of strengthening investigations into grave violations of children's rights.

67. As a member of the review group on the United Nations human rights due diligence policy, the Special Representative continued to emphasize the links between the children and armed conflict mandate and the implementation of the policy, including through enhanced cross-fertilization between action plans and mitigating measures to be undertaken in implementation of the policy.

68. As a member of the Rights Up Front network and through occasional invitations to the senior advisory group chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, the Special Representative and her office have been involved in the operationalization of the Rights Up Front action plan and have provided information and advice on situations of concern.

69. The office of the Special Representative worked closely with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations on the development of standardized training modules on child protection for all categories of peacekeeping personnel. To that end, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations has updated its core predeployment training materials and has developed a two-day specialized training course for

military personnel on child protection to be conducted during their predeployment training. The materials were validated by Member States in Kenya in March 2013, piloted in Malaysia and Uruguay in the third quarter of 2013 and launched in April 2014. The training of peacekeepers is central to the protection of children in peacekeeping and for monitoring and reporting. The Special Representative encourages Member States and regional organizations to take full advantage of the training to ensure that troops are trained in child protection before and during their deployment in peacekeeping operations. Moreover, the Special Representative's office is working very closely with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, OHCHR and UNICEF on the planning processes for current and upcoming peacekeeping operations with regard to adequate child protection capacity.

B. Working with regional organizations

African Union

70. Throughout the reporting period, the Special Representative sustained her engagement with the African Union. On 17 September 2013, she formalized the ongoing collaboration through a joint declaration of intent which foresaw the following areas of collaboration, to be implemented jointly with UNICEF: (a) the development of a strategy to mainstream child protection concerns in African Union activities; (b) the establishment of policies and practices on child protection in accordance with regional and international standards, including the development of guidelines for African Union-led missions; (c) the assurance of a dedicated child protection capacity within the Peace and Security Department of the African Union Commission; and (d) the joint development a programme of work to further implement the activities foreseen in the declaration. As envisioned in the declaration, the United Nations and the African Union have deployed a child protection adviser to advance the partnership's objectives.

71. In January, the Special Representative attended the high-level segment of the African Union Summit with the view to strengthening partnerships, engaging in discussions and advocating on the protection of children affected by armed conflict with the Heads of States and ministers of the African countries covered by her mandate.

72. The Special Representative briefed the African Union Peace and Security Council in Addis Ababa on 8 May at the Council's first open session dedicated to children affected by armed conflict, convened under the chairmanship of the United Republic of Tanzania. During the session, the Special Representative received strong support from all members of the Peace and Security Council, and the meeting proved to be an opportunity to discuss issues affecting children in conflict situations in Africa, with an emphasis on sustainable reintegration. Members of the Peace and Security Council welcomed the partnership with the office of the Special Representative, supported the Children, Not Soldiers campaign and requested that regular sessions be held on the issue of children and armed conflict.

73. The Special Representative also took that opportunity to meet with the Secretariat of the African Union Commission of Inquiry for South Sudan to explore possibilities for providing dedicated expertise on child protection to the Commission. In addition, the Special Representative held discussions with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development to collaborate on enhancing the

protection of children in South Sudan during the operationalization phase of the ceasefire agreement. The Special Representative will continue to engage with the African Union to ensure effective collaboration and follow-up.

League of Arab States

74. Since a number of situations included in the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict are in the Arab region, the Special Representative continued to engage with the League of Arab States, in follow-up to her previous visit to the headquarters of the League in Cairo in 2012. During the reporting period, the Special Representative met with the Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States to the United Nations with the aim of identifying tools to further enhance cooperation with the League, in line with the twelfth United Nations-League of Arab States general cooperation meeting held in Geneva in June. In July, the Special Representative conducted a briefing in New York for the permanent representatives to the United Nations of member States of the League on her mandate and on ways forward to enhance the engagement between her office and the League. The Special Representative and League, led by its office in New York, will seek to develop an agreement to facilitate collaboration and to develop a framework for action on the issue of children and armed conflict within the broader work of League in contexts of armed conflict in Member States.

European Union

75. The Special Representative continued to strengthen her partnership with the European Union. She emphasized the importance of fostering the implementation of the European Union Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict and the importance of the European Union utilizing all available tools for the benefit of children affected by armed conflict. Her office remained in close contact with the European Union on issues of advocacy, chiefly through the European External Action Service, where mainstreaming is well advanced. In June, for example, the Special Representative's office, in conjunction with UNICEF and civil society organizations, conducted a training of European External Action Service staff in Brussels on child protection. The Special Representative and the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, have also undertaken joint public advocacy on the rights of children in conflict.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization

76. The Special Representative continued to engage with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), particularly with regard to the institutionalization of the organization's child protection framework. The framework includes a practical child protection training regime for NATO soldiers and partners, and appropriate assistance for supporting the implementation of action plans in relevant NATO operations. Adoption of the outcome documents of the NATO summit held in Chicago, United States, in May 2012, which included specific references to children affected by armed conflict, was an important milestone in mainstreaming child protection concerns within NATO. The Office of the Special Representative continues to provide support to further develop NATO training on child protection, building on the previous development of web-based training launched in 2013 and other resources. The Special Representative looks forward to further strengthening

the NATO focus on child protection concerns during the upcoming summit to be held in Wales in September 2014.

VI. Recommendations

77. The Special Representative calls upon the Member States that are the focus of the Children, Not Soldiers campaign to redouble their efforts and intensify their collaboration with the United Nations and other child protection actors towards compliance with their commitments. In that regard, she calls upon donors to provide adequate and sustained funding for the implementation of action plans.

78. The Special Representative calls upon Member States and regional organizations to continue to facilitate United Nations access to and dialogue with non-State armed groups with a view to ending and preventing grave violations of children's rights, including through mainstreaming child protection concerns in ceasefire and peace negotiations and within implementation mechanisms.

79. The Special Representative calls upon Member States to seek alternatives to the prosecution and detention of children for their alleged association with armed groups or under counter-terrorism mechanisms or to ensure, at a minimum, that trials and procedures are consistent with international juvenile justice standards.

80. Noting the importance of early consideration and long-term planning to the process of reintegrating and rehabilitating children affected by armed conflict, which lies at the heart of the security-development nexus, the Special Representative calls for the inclusion of the issue in the peacebuilding, recovery and development agenda of international agencies and bilateral donors and its adequate reflection in the formulation of sustainable development goals.

81. The Special Representative urges Member States that have not done so to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and to enact effective national legislation and policies to criminalize the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups.

82. The Special Representative calls upon Member States, regional organizations and parties to conflict to make every effort to protect schools and hospitals and to adopt concrete measures to deter the military use of schools.

83. The Special Representative calls upon Member States and civil society to ensure that particular attention is paid to the plight of girls and boys and to promote specific provisions for children in global efforts to end, prevent and respond to sexual violence in conflict.